International
CLINICAL TRIALS

Building Sustainable Clinical Research Sites: The Backbone of Trial Success

Interview with Dana Feuchtbaum, Chief Product Officer, Iterative Health

International Clinical Trials (ICT) spoke with Dana Feuchtbaum and explored the systemic challenges sites face, what drives long-term success and how the research ecosystem can better support this essential infrastructure needed to advance cutting-edge therapies to market.

ICT: What challenges do sites face to sustain research as an ancillary?

Dana Feuchtbaum (DF): The work of clinical research sites is foundational to innovation in medicine, yet sustaining these sites is becoming increasingly difficult. Conducting research is inherently complex, burdened with operational inefficiencies, regulatory hurdles and financial unpredictability. Sites must operate as agile engines of discovery while confronting the reality of uncertain financial returns.

Staffing remains one of the most pressing issues. Turnover is high, with upwards of 30% among clinical research coordinators, and more than half have been in their roles for fewer than three years.[1,2] Such turnover erodes continuity and institutional knowledge, making consistent execution a challenge. Meanwhile, protocols have become significantly more demanding, many requiring upwards of 170 procedures across 11 visits in just under six months.[2] These demands add to the strain on site personnel, especially physicians, more than 60% of whom cite workflow burdens as a barrier to research participation.[3]

Patient recruitment is another persistent obstacle. Despite the critical importance of enrolment, over half of the research sites enrol one or fewer patients in their studies.[4] As a result, nearly 90% of US trials fail to meet enrolment targets within their planned


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timelines.[5] This challenge is particularly acute in therapeutic areas like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), where trial volume has surged despite low disease prevalence, making it even harder for sites to find studies suited to their patient populations.[6]

ICT: What factors impact research sites' sustainability as a profitable and growing ancillary?

DF: Sustainability in research is not simply about survival; it is about building the foundation for long-term success. Several pillars determine whether a research site can operate profitably and grow as an ancillary service. Staffing is paramount.

Experienced, engaged research coordinators and principal investigators form the backbone of successful trials. These professionals are not only committed to the research enterprise but also play a proactive role in educating patients about clinical

trial opportunities, a critical component in recruitment and retention. Operations must be efficient and scalable. Sites that establish streamlined processes and balance workload across team members are far more likely to manage complex studies effectively. Managing time and resources across multiple protocols while preserving patient experience requires disciplined, systematised operations. Financial viability depends on strong sponsor relationships and budgets that adequately compensate for the value the site is delivering. Maintaining a healthy pipeline of trials aligned with a site's patient population and operational capabilities is equally critical to ensuring continuity and profitability. Sites must be intentional about not only securing a robust pipeline of studies, but also the right studies that are operationally feasible to execute, that represent novel treatment options for their patients and that are patient-centric, e.g., include long-term extensions to ensure patients continue to benefit. Sustainability, then, is not a single initiative. It is the result of balancing strategic staffing, disciplined operations and financial foresight.

ICT: What solutions are most promising and actionable to impact the sustainability of research sites?

DF: Supporting research site sustainability requires acknowledging the burdens that hinder their progress. Sites often navigate the full weight of trial start-up, from budget and contract negotiations to institutional review board (IRB) approvals, long before they see any patient or reimbursement. This lag time places tremendous financial and operational strain on research teams. Principal investigators are expected to wear many hats: scientific leader; clinician; administrator and general manager. This multifaceted role limits the time and energy they can dedicate to either patient care or research advancement. Meanwhile, coordinators manage daily trial execution, compliance, data entry and patient follow-up, often across multiple studies. Burnout is an all-too-common consequence. Technology must be embedded thoughtfully, paired with training, tailored integration and dedicated support, to truly serve site success. Over half of coordinators report struggling with integrating new platforms.[7] Simply adding tools is not enough; solutions must fit into workflows and meaningfully enhance performance.

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Sustainable progress depends on partners who are genuinely invested in the long-term health of research sites. These partners provide end-to-end study support, source appropriate trials, consult on regulatory and financial matters, and help scale operations sustainably. Personalised onboarding and ongoing development for research staff, particularly in areas such as regulatory affairs, patient communication and financial forecasting, is equally important. These investments are not luxuries. They are necessities if we want research sites to thrive and accelerate the path to innovation.

ICT: Why is site sustainability important and who does it impact?

DF: At its core, clinical research is about accelerating research to get new, improved medicines in the hands of patients faster. Research sites stand at the frontlines of that mission. Their sustainability directly influences how quickly and equitably new treatments reach the people who need them. For sponsors, sustainable sites offer confidence. They consistently enrol patients, maintain compliance and execute studies with quality, essential attributes when timelines and data integrity are critical. If clinical research sites can consistently meet and exceed randomisation goals, sponsors can reliably complete their trials, and even do so sooner, resulting in significant cost savings and revenue optimisation. For patients, strong research sites mean broader

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access to trials, more options for care and earlier availability of potentially life-changing therapies. The broader research ecosystem depends on a healthy supply of capable, well-resourced sites. Without them, trials stall, costs rise and scientific advancement slows. Addressing site sustainability is the greatest opportunity we have today to improve the clinical trial enterprise, and one of the most urgent. By focusing on the needs of research sites, from staffing and training to operations and financial health, we not only strengthen the infrastructure of clinical research but also accelerate the delivery of therapies that change lives. That, ultimately, is the measure of success.

Dana Feuchtbaum *is Chief Product Officer at Iterative Health, where she leads the development of solutions that strengthen clinical research operations and expand access to innovative therapies. She brings extensive experience in healthcare technology and product strategy, having previously served as Senior Vice President of Product at Nym and Senior Director of Product Management at Flatiron Health. Dana holds an MBA from Harvard Business School, MA, US, and a BA in International Relations from Brown University, RI, US.*

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Iterative Health is a healthcare technology and services company on a mission to empower exceptional GI care through relentless innovation in technology and services. With deep expertise in artificial intelligence and clinical research, we empower healthcare professionals to provide consistently high-quality colorectal cancer screenings and support clinical research teams and study sponsors to expand and accelerate patient access to novel therapeutics.

The company is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with offices across the United States.

To learn more, get in touch, or explore a partnership, visit: http://iterative.health

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